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AUTHOR Kline, William
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ABSTRACT

In fall 1984, the Jefferson Parish (Louisiana) School Board established a Principals' Instructional Leadership Development Project to focus on the correlates of effective schools and develop a project designed to improve principals' leadership characteristics. This paper describes the two-year project, which developed a model emphasizing principals' decisions regarding project structure, processes, and content. The target population comprised 84 principals representing all grade levels and a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic populations. After reviewing exemplary principal behaviors promulgated by effective schools research, the paper lists three guiding principles: (1) avoidance of a general workshop format; (2) the importance of building on principals' current concerns; and (3) emphasis on a collegial model for principal inservice development. In the first year, the project had three stages: (1) concerns and discussion; (2) a blending of concerns with research information on school effectiveness; and (3) a committee to plan for the second year. The committee decided to develop a peer team inservice model, and all principals were placed on carefully constructed seven-member teams representing various school levels. Each team made a series of "round robin" visits to team members' schools, followed by cluster meetings comprised of three teams each to debrief the visits and discuss related matters. These visits were informal and nonevaluative, with the agenda set by the host principal. At least 75 percent of the principals are active participants. Cluster meetings elicited mutually supportive comments and validated the peer team approach to sharing and collegiality. Included are nine references. (MLH).

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A COLLEGIAL MODEL FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

William Kline
Loyola University, New Orleans

In fall, 1984, the Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, School Board established a Principals' Instructional Leadership Development Project.1 The purpose of the project was to focus on the correlates of effective schools and develop a project designed to improve principals' leadership characteristics at the school site. This paper describes the project, in which a model was devised emphasizing principals' decisions regarding project structure, processes and content. The target population consists of 84 principals, representing all grade levels and a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic populations.

In the last decade, a large body of research literature has been developed focusing on characteristics of "effective schools." Many of these school effectiveness studies point to the instrumental behavior of the building principal (Goodlad, 1984; Edmonds, 1979; Brookover, 1982.).

Typically such studies promulgate lists of recurring behaviors of exemplary principals such as the following by Persell

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and Cookson (Strother, 1983.):

1. Demonstrating a commitment to academic goals
2. Creating a climate of high expectations
3. Functioning as an instructional leader
4. Being a forceful and dynamic leader
5. Consulting effectively with others
6. Creating order and discipline
7. Marshalling resources
8. Using time well
9. Evaluating results.

It is in the context of this school effectiveness movement that the Jefferson Parish School Board allocated resources for the development of a long-term project to improve the instructional leadership of school principals. It was anticipated that the project would exist for at least two years, possibly longer. This author was asked to serve as facilitator/consultant to the project.

In preparing for the project, three caveats were agreed upon:

1. The Project would not utilize workshops on school effectiveness as the primary mode of delivery.

2. The project would build on principals' current concerns as the assigned school-site leaders in the parish.

3. Guiding theory for the project would emphasize a collegial model for principal inservice development.

The decision to avoid a general workshop format was centered on two assumptions. The first is that most principals have alrea-

dy heard the message regarding effective school leadership. To simply repeat this message would be minimally useful. Secondly, most workshop information lacks contextual meaning for principals who must confront a variety of tasks inherent in the role. The potential for site application of workshop content seemed limited.

The second caveat was premised on the notion that instructional leadership has always been a part of the principal's role and could not be developed independently of the immediate context of the school. Although many principals have always regarded instructional leadership as central to what they do, recent developments such as legislative mandates, court decisions and collective bargaining have impacted principals and have led to an implicit reconceptualization of the role by many in which the principal is viewed as "manager" rather than "leader." Added to this is the view held by many educators that most principals are not particularly well suited or situated for "instructional leadership."

The third caveat had to do with the changing character of authority roles in the society generally, in which leader effectiveness theory is linked with such skills and traits as negotiation, compromise, persuasion, and tolerance of ambiguity. Thus, a "congruent" model was devised in which these characteristics would be fostered and encouraged by a process emphasizing interaction among all participants. A general framework was devised at the outset, building on principal concerns followed by a collegial structure in which the principals themselves would make key decisions regarding project development.

In the first year, the project consisted of three stages: The first stage was a "concerns"-oriented stage in which principals were given an opportunity to discuss problems and constraints in carrying out their work. The second blended principals' expressed concerns with research information on school effectiveness. The third consisted of the formation of a planning committee to develop a plan for the second year.

The first phase was structured with a limited sense of immediate substantive outcomes, but with a fairly clear sense of procedures and processes likely to lead to long term project development. Simply put, we wanted to begin the project by giving principals opportunities to share concerns and then to use these concerns as a basis for contining the project. In this first stage, principals were organized into small groups of about ten to twelve individuals. Each group met for two hours with an open agenda. Discussions flowed freely, with several consistent themes emerging from group to group. Some topics were such that immediate administrative action could be taken in some cases to alleviate strain, such as eliminating nonessential meetings and paperwork. Themes having tc do with morale and interpersonal relationships among staff occupied a large share of discussion time and foreshadowed what would follow in year two. In most instances, principals expressed frustration in addressing instructional needs, given the nature of administrative and political demands on time.

In the second stage, groups were combined into larger units and a workshop format was utilized, blending synthesized data

from the first phase with research findings on school effectiveness. Although this phase was familiar territory for many principals, about half attended regularly and participated actively. Although the explicit purpose was to give information on school effectiveness, importance was also placed on the purpose of using these meetings to develop a cadre of principals willing to assume leadership of the project as a whole. In order to encourage this, the meetings were "process" oriented with strong emphasis on small group activities and general discussions. Content was drawn from several sources, including studies on school effectiveness, organizational development and leadership theory (Goodlad, 1984; Edmonds, 1979, Fiedler, 1967.).

In the the third stage a planning committee was convened to develop plans for the continuation of the project. About twenty principals out of the initial group of 84 volunteered to participate in this phase of the project and several meetings were held in late spring and early summer, 1985. Goals for this phase were entirely in the hands of the committee, although the committee was also asked by the Superintendent to develop a statement of effective leadership characteristics to be used as a guideline for evaluating principals. Although developing this document was tangential to the central purposes of the group, the task focused participants' attention on substantive issues relevant to the planning task.

As for this project, the committee focused on the development of a structure that would continue to bring principals together into a mutually supportive environment in which problems and issues could be shared and efforts taken to assist one ano-

ther. The committee decided to develop a peer team inservice model for year two.

The Peer Team Model

The Planning Committee placed all principals in Peer Teams of seven members, representing elementary, middle/junior high, high school and special schools. Each team was carefully constructed by the Planning Committee to insure a geographic spread, the placement of Planning Committee members on each team, a distribution of potential "blockers" and friendship groups among the teams. The purpose in doing the latter was to minimize the potential for early conflict regarding project goals and to minimize the effects of "history."

The task for each team would be a series of "round robin" visits to each team member's school, followed by "Cluster Meetings comprised of three teams each for purposes of debriefing the visits and discussing related matters. A clear rule established by the Planning committee was that the visits would be distinctively informal and non-evaluative with the agenda to be set by the host principal. (There was some indication that such an approach would provide a sort of countervailing relief from visits by district administrative or State Department evaluation teams.) In peer teams, the principals would have a vehicle in which they could provide support and encouragement for each other and begin to build a norm leading to collegial problem-solving.

To expedite the process, the Planning Committee, with full support from the Superintendent of Schools, utilized a Principal's Inservice Day in mid-August to present and organize the

Peer Team program. An entire day was devoted to this effort. In addition to the Peer Team organizing task, a "school effectiveness" presentation was given by an outside presenter in order to provide a general focus of the entire inservice project. A cocktail party was a fitting conclusion to the inservice day.

Outcomes

To date, most teams have had three to four site visits each and all have participated in three Cluster Meetings. Two Planning Committee meetings have been held plus a day-long workshop introducing Quality Circles and the concept of high expectations. Data collected in reporting on this project has been obtained from principals' self-reporting combined with observations of behavior in the teams, Cluster and Planning Committee meetings. Consistent with the "open-agenda," "process" character of the program, we have not attempted to engage in a formal evaluation, preferring to rely on "naturalistic," informal data. Formal evaluation has been eschewed partly in response to concerns expressed by principals that they felt over-evaluated as a consequence of parish and state efforts to enforce accountability. Furthermore, formal evaluation and the notion of peer support can be seen as contradictions in purpose and outcome.

There appears to be a high degree of enthusiasm among the active participants, estimated to consist of 75% of the principals. (Attendance at meetings is an imprecise measure of enthusiasm insofar as some principals may value team visits but feel little need to debrief these meetings with members of other teams.) Peer Teams report that most team visits have at least

five out of seven members in attendance and the visits usually span a half day in time.

Three of the the four first-round Cluster Meetings were characterized by generally positive affect and mutually supportive comments. One meeting was sparsely attended and two principals pressed this consultant for the "goals of the project." These questions were not answered to the satisfaction of those asking the questions. This issue did not arise in this team's second Cluster Meeting, although there is some evidence that several principals continue to disagree with the nature of the project.

Successive Cluster Meetings have continued to validate the notion that Peer Teams provide opportunities for mutual support and sharing. Discussions have also focused on some tentative approaches to solving particular problems, such as sharing teachers, creating peer teams among teachers and focusing on instructional problems in particular schools. The issue of nonparticipation continues to surface, but there appears to be consensus that reluctant members should not be coerced or threatened either by peers or by the school administration. Such coercion would seem to inconsistent with the general character of a self-driven, peer-oriented inservice program.

As mentioned above, the teams were structured in such fashion as to attempt to include individuals heretofore identified as "blockers." Although the word "blocker" was not operationally defined by the Planning Committee, such individuals were identified from previous experiences in administrative meetings, committees and the like. Interestingly, some of the minor succes-

ses in the project speak to some of the activities of these individuals. Several attest to increased morale and interest in professional development and have engaged in activities spawned by the project but certainly not foreseen in the early planning. This would suggest that perhaps peer efforts hold some promise in addressing the intrapersonal needs of some principals.

Peer teams are currently at a stage in which participants are giving each other positive strokes regarding school and program structure. Most issues raised in Cluster Meetings have been somewhat nonthreatening in character. Yet, by gingerly treading on selected issues, principals are developing norms of cohesion and inclusion for their groups. As groups become increasing cohesive and inclusive, norms of trust and openness will be fostered, allowing individuals the opportunity to bring "real" problems to the team for assistance.

There appears to be a perception that the character and purpose of upper administrative evaluation efforts has "softened" somewhat and become more receptive to principals' concerns. This could be part of an interest on upper level administrators to be included in the project. It could also reflect a growing feeling of autonomy on the part of principals in which outside evaluations are becoming less threatening due to the collegiality fostered by the project. Peer evaluations may simply come to carry more weight than official evaluations conducted by external authorities.

During the first phase of the team visits, this consultant was asked to meet with the Area Superintendents and their in-

structional staffs to discuss the nature of the project. Subsequent additional meetings have been held and the two Area Superintendents attended a Planning Committee meeting held in early November. This increased interest by other administrative personnel may be contributing to changed perceptions of the principals as discussed above.

Numerous incidents along the way provide examples of the character of the project and how the project seems to contribute to participants' morale and sense of professional ambition. Although such incidents are not powerful in terms of general educational change, they do serve as unobtrusive measures of project effectiveness and help provide a history for the project. One such incident was a case in which an elementary principal returned to a high school in which he visited and gave a geography presentation to a high school class.

Conclusions

It remains to be seen if this project leads to improved instructional leadership among principals. Such language contains an assumption that instructional leadership is possible and desirable. Interestingly, definitions of instructional leadership are remarkably nonoperational in nature, consisting usually of an array of behaviors designed to provide order and continuity in the life of the school as contrasted with specific activities having to do with curriculum and classroom instruction. Even if the nature of such leadership can be agreed upon, we must still ask if principals can properly be considered as objects of change in their schools. Wolcott, for example suggests not; that principals are sufficiently ". . . preoccupied with urgencies so as

to not have time to get to the essentials." (Spindler, 1982. 78.).

Part of the problem lies in the tendency of the school effectiveness movement to focus primarily on the effects of the people involved in roles rather than on the effects of roles on the people. It may be that a given role is of such a nature that good inservice most productively focuses on the extent to which human, as opposed to professional needs are addressed. Principals live and work in a form of social and geographical isolation, often in very demanding interpersonal settings in which questions of control, order and authority persist. Cohen and March, in discussing the nature of the college presidency (1974), suggest four fundamental ambiguities of educational leadership: purpose, power, experience and success. These same ambiguities can be said to apply to principals as well.

In the case of schools we continue to ask questions about the goals of the organization. Simple educational achievement cannot begin to answer the question of goals, especially when we give consideration to the myriad of purposes we all have for our schools. Without question, the events in a principal's daily agenda suggest complexity here. In workshop phase of this project, "visions" written and shared by participants spoke to a variety of goals, often subordinating simple academic achievement to other priorities such as obtaining resources, structuring orderly and safe environments and providing comfortable and nurturing environments for kids.

With respect to power, the principal is continually confronted with questions having to do with what can be legitimately

done in a given situation. From teacher evaluation, to parental relations, the principal operates in an environment fraught with ambiguity. A continuing thread in this project is the question of how much authority one has and how it can best be used.

The extent to which principals can rely on either theories of leadership or prior experience as they adapt to the problems of school leadership is unclear. It is likely that neither set provides workable guidelines. Experience in this setting may be totally inadequate to address events unfolding in that setting. Success is the final question and for a principal and one issue is that of knowing when one has achieved it.

Given the ambiguities of the role, an effective long term solution may be one in which principals are directed to system-wide agendas extending beyond their respective schools. Peer teams appear to be effective vehicles for providing this as principals grapple with the vagaries of their role. Collegiality may or may not address the immediate issues of instruction, but may hold promise with regard to long term adaptations to a most demanding role.

NOTES

1. The following parish administrators have provided the necessary resources and leadership for the project: Anthony Chimento, Superintendent of Schools and Dee Allen, Director of Persoonnel for Staff Development and Evaluation.

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